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Excursus on Contessa Priuli, with postscript

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Excursus on Contessa Priuli, with postscript

Abstract

I have dedicated this collection of essays to the memory of Contessa Lilian Priuli-Bon because I begin to understand that, unless I myself make notice of her, hers was a life and a sensibility – a remarkable historical intelligence – which likely will remain without record.

Disciplines

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A files

Afiles

<i>Davide Spina</i>	3	The Good, the Bad and the Malaparte
<i>Thomas Daniell</i>	20	In Conversation with Itsuko Hasegawa
<i>Mario Tedeschini-Lalli</i>	40	Descent from Paradise
<i>Laurent Stalder & Moritz Gleich</i>	57	Stirling's Arrows
<i>Colin Rowe</i>	68	Excursus on Contessa Priuli, with a postscript by Daniel Naegele
<i>Irénée Scalbert</i>	73	The Nature of Gothic
<i>Peter St John</i>	96	Cathedral
<i>Silvia Micheli & Léa-Catherine Szacka</i>	98	Paolo's Triangolo
<i>Paulo Berdini</i>	107	Introduction to <i>La matematica della villa ideale</i> , with a postscript by Daniel Sherer
<i>Hubert Damisch</i>	115	Noah's Ark
<i>Nicolas Kemper</i>	127	The Hideous Duty of Isaiah Berlin
<i>Thomas Weaver</i>	134	In Conversation with Alexander Brodsky
<i>Emma Letizia Jones</i>	152	The Wanderer
<i>Henrik Schoenefeldt</i>	161	The Lost (First) Chamber of the House of Commons
<i>Max Moya</i>	174	Bawa's Rolls
	176	Contributors

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A Note on the Display Initials

Drawn by Adrien Vasquez of the John Morgan studio, and featured in the twin texts on or by Colin Rowe, the display initials in this issue are an adaptation of a slab-serif typeface developed in the first half of the nineteenth century by the English punch-cutters Bower & Bacon and by the Fann Street Foundry, bought in 1820 by William Thorowgood with a large sum of money he had just won in the lottery. Thorowgood was the first to use the term 'grotesque' to describe a sans-serif typeface. Similar letterfaces were used in the 1940s in the pages of *The Architectural Review* – the journal that first published Rowe's 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' in March 1947 – whose characteristically English vernacular typography also seems fitting given Rowe's idiosyncratic, spoken and resolutely English prose. These letterfaces are printed in the antique madder lake of this issue's inside cover – which, alongside the cover colour, reference the signature pinks and apple greens of Hieronymus Bosch, whose works have recently been on display at the Noordbrabants Museum in Den Bosch, Netherlands.

I have dedicated this collection of essays to the memory of Contessa Lilian Priuli-Bon because I begin to understand that, unless I myself make notice of her, hers was a life and a sensibility – a remarkable historical intelligence – which likely will remain without record.

The first thing to say about Contessa Priuli is that she wasn't Italian and she wasn't rich. In terms of theological speculation, in Italy, she had moved in circles of intellectual brilliance. In terms of art history, she had written a monograph on Sodoma (I have not read it). In terms of the history of ideas, she had acquired by marriage the celebrated Venetian name of Priuli and by historical empathy, by osmosis, had absorbed the politics of the Venetian Republic; by means of visual observation, reading and recollection, she had then, by the time that I met her, placed herself *centre-stage* in a prominent theatre of sixteenth-century dispute.

Lilian Priuli-Bon was half-Swedish and half-Welsh – an unlikely combination. Her father was Dean of Uppsala – I have always supposed of the cathedral rather than of any university department. And, when she was 18 or so, it became the ambition of her parents to marry her off to a Prussian landowner, Kurt von Beckerath – 'but, Colin, I could *never* have married von Beckerath, he was so cruel to his horses'. To me, this is like something out of Turgenev or Gogol. I picture long extents of land, not much gradient, not quite steppes, all interspersed with lakes and forests, farms and country houses, now totally vanished, but always – horses, horses, horses.



nyway, whatever the accuracy of this image, I think this is what the young Lilian saw, and she acted accordingly – she never *did* like horses. If not entirely dazzling, the destiny which her parents had planned for her was – within the realms of imagination – clearly to be associated with a modest opulence; but *that* society, *that* Baltic light, above all *those* horses – if not a fate worse than death, evidently, to her, this had presented itself as a near-equivalent.

But fortunately help was at hand. She had an aunt; the aunt was sympathetic; she understood – I think – the resolute type of St Birgitta or Queen Christina, the type which used to abound as Swedish landladies of Swedish *pensione* in Siena, Palermo, Rome; the Swedish type which abandons Sweden *never* to return. The aunt was planning a journey through Italy; I suspect there was a conspiracy – but the idea was promoted that Lilian should travel with her. Did the parents, with unjustifiable *naïveté*, imagine *she would* return to Kurt von Beckerath? If so, they didn't understand the *style* of their offspring. For, apparently, it was one of those arrivals in Italy which is love at first sight; and, very shortly, Lilian married her little *conte* – who was also an *architect*.

I don't know very much about Lorenzo Priuli's practice, except that he was a restorer of Byzantine churches; and for this reason I like to place the pair of them, freshly married, in all sorts of Byzantine and then Romanesque locations. I have quite sentimental notions of them at Ravenna, Ferrara, Modena, the Abbey of Pomposa and all the rest. The Romanesque excitement, I get the impression, came a little later. But Romanesque excitement there

Excursus on Contessa Priuli-Bon

Colin Rowe

had been; and mostly down in Puglia. For talk about Trani, Troia, Barletta, Bitonto, Bitetto, Castel del Monte was abundant proof of all that.

And then, as Contessa Priuli, Lilian had acquired a genealogy. In the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there were no less than three Doges of Venice who carried the name Priuli: Lorenzo (1556–1559), Girolamo (1559–1567) and Antonio (1618–1623). In Lilian's terms, the Doge Antonio eclipsed all others. It was *he*,

accompanied by Galileo, who had climbed the campanile to take a look at Padua through Galileo's newly invented optical instrument, that famous telescope suitably lined in red velvet.

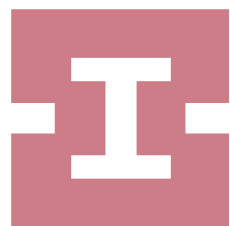
Thus there was a big emotional investment, both in the history of science and the history of Venice. Obviously, she felt almost a proprietor of Galileo and identified with him in his condemnation by the Vatican. And then she moved, by extensions, *from* science *to* Venetian politics of religion, *from* an extreme preoccupation with Galileo *to* an extreme fixation with Fra Paolo Sarpi (something I've found quite easy to do myself since she told me all this stuff). It was Sarpi who defended the Venetian state after it was put under an Interdict by Pope Paul V (formerly Camillo Borghese) in 1606. And still more. As part of his polemic against the Vatican, Sarpi wrote the first history of the Council of Trent, dedicated to James I (James VI of Scotland). A worshipper of the Venetian state, *esto perpetua*, Sarpi was more Venetian than Catholic, with the Venetian disdain for Rome. After all, Venice could, and did, make a persistent claim for a superior legitimacy – it was Venice, affiliated both to Byzantium and antiquity, which was the true heir of Roman *virtu*. And it was with this – the tradition of Venetian *campanilismo* – that Lilian remained associated.

And for these reasons she never was converted – she *couldn't* be Protestant and she *wouldn't* be Catholic. She found another specimen of this *via media* predicament with another Priuli, who in the 1540s was attached to the English Cardinal Reginald Pole, then papal legate at Viterbo. And Reginald Pole? Educated at the University of Padua, he was a cousin of Henry VIII and had, perhaps, a rather better claim to the throne of England than his Tudor relative, who had Pole's entire family exterminated, apart from him. At the papal conclave of 1550–51 he was a highly regarded candidate for election and, in competition with the future Julius III, is said to have failed by only one vote. Subsequently, as a person whose doctrinal correctness *might* be suspect, Pole suffered persecution from Gian Pietro Carafa, later Pope Paul IV, before leaving for England to assume the dignity of Archbishop of Canterbury – this much to the satisfaction of his cousin, Queen Mary I, Mary Tudor, the Bloody Mary of legend, and the highly unsuccessful wife of Philip II of Spain. Among Pole's friends, along with Priuli, are said to have been Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna – more *via media* people? – to whom Michelangelo wrote a sequence of sonnets.

So here we are, absolutely in the *thick* of sixteenth-century religious and political ambiguities. And give or take a few years around 1900, what exactly did this all mean for a Swedish-Welsh, adoptive Venetian, intelligent and of quiet ferocity, with religious and historical interests, a good eye and an anti-Vatican inclination?

Of course, except for Lilian's pro-Venice predispositions, this wasn't really such a very arcane position. Within the Church, there were others, more than a few, who felt less than happy about doctrine as officially or 'infallibly' promulgated. Among them was the Anglo-Bavarian Lord Acton, born in Naples, with a cardinal for an uncle and William Ewart Gladstone as a friend in his maturity, who in 1870 had registered extreme distaste for the Dogma of Infallibility as it was pronounced at the Vatican Council of that year. And Lilian *had* known Lord Acton, though I can scarcely think that she knew him very well. For in the 1890s Acton must have been in Bavaria (where he owned a property on the Tegernsee) or in England (where he became Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge) or failing these on the French Riviera (for reasons of health). In any case, Lilian's friends belonged to a somewhat later generation.

I first met Lilian in 1946. This was at 43 Paultons Square, Chelsea, at a crowded party in the upstairs drawing room. She was sitting, decorated with some Italian order, in a large wing chair – one of the kind with a curved rather than a flat back, covered with a yellow slip cover – placed between the fireplace and the nearest of the two windows. The chair was enviably big and she becoming diminutive and, I suppose, at least 75 years old [actually, she would have been 86 or 87 by then —*ed*]. Over the fireplace was a large and bland Ben Nicholson, and on the mantelshelf a pair of small Staffordshire dogs (English folk art?) and a good French early nineteenth-century carriage clock, and there were also a lot of night lights in small Chinese bowls – these more for looks than light.



now think that it was a prepared meeting. I was led up and introduced. Adjacent there was a padded (Berlin wool work) x-frame, late-Regency stool. I was motioned to sit on it and, though the fire was going to be rather too warm on my back, down I sat and, though other people were brought up, for the rest of the evening I never moved. At that time I was hyper-excited about Palladian villas; she seemed to know them as individual buildings; for the rest of the evening, we simply talked – about these villas and about herself, considered to be related topics. Retrospectively it was an auspicious beginning.

But now to say something about 43 Paultons Square itself, where I had an apartment in the basement, and about my landlady, Enid Furlonger, whose party it was. 43 Paultons Square is one of those smaller Chelsea houses of the 1830s or 1840s which are too narrow and too inconveniently tall – in this case about 17ft wide and, including the basement, five floors high. Nor was it all that very deep from front to back – the London townhouse of this period never has the more accommodating depth of the American townhouse of a slightly later date – an average depth must have been about 30ft, with staircase cramped and back room too narrow. But excellently constructed shutters – of the type found both in London and New York/Boston, but not in continental Europe – were a characteristic of these particular properties.

These houses were not convenient for the occupancy of the large Victorian families that arrived so soon after they were built. You might pack the bedrooms, you might put a couple of virtual slaves – or a husband and a wife – along with the kitchen in the basement, but the dining room would scarcely have been big enough, and the other three living rooms more than a bit restrictive. They

were built, I think this is evident, for a practice which flourished in London throughout the nineteenth century. A widow – it had to be a widow – would acquire one of these houses and rent out rooms and the subdivision of the place would follow something like this: she would occupy the ground floor herself – supervision and dislike of stairs; the servants would be in the basement – kitchen adequate and bedroom tight; then the rest was disposed of floor by floor, each with two rooms, sometimes *en suite*. Meals served floor by floor, a lot of fetching and carrying for the servants? There can't have been an alternative. Though the basements are not really oppressive, it does seem to have been, for them, the sort of life which *should* have incited revolution.



nd the tenants, who were they? Inevitably, one supposes widows again; widows and retired military men, half-pay officers, a succession of political refugees – conspiratorial French Bonapartists, Italian liberals, French anti-Bonapartists, people like Karl Marx and later Russians, anarchists and nihilists – all these with a miscellany of aspiring journalists and literary men, ambitious and on the make. You got your rooms, you got your food, you got your laundry, and you got your boots blacked: this very important in a period when, because of all those horses in the streets, black boots and *not* brown shoes were standard wear. Though in a different part of town, it was to this kind of house that George Bernard Shaw was introduced when he came to London from Dublin in 1876; and, though he didn't like it, as a struggling music critic and impresario of a theoretical politics, he was able to endure it – for several years.

I may have misinterpreted the origins of the Paultons Square houses for this landlady trade – they are rather far down the King's Road, almost at the World's End. But about some houses adjacent to the Royal Hospital – Cheltenham Terrace, Walpole Street – there can be no doubt: stock them up with impecunious relics and specimens of the elderly, apoplectic military, and I think you have the picture. For the most part Chelsea's bigger, and more particular, houses came later – in the 1870s; and then it was later still – after 1918 – that the earlier Georgian builder's houses came to be considered 'desirable property'. It must have therefore been about 1938 that number 43, as a house which had come to possess *cachet*, had been bought for Miss Enid Furlonger.

Enid had come to London from Canada. I think she had been engaged to somebody who lived in England, but the engagement fell through, hence the house which was too big for her. I was recommended as a possible tenant by a Chinese friend of mine; he was Enid's tenant and was about to return to China. He had told her I was called 'Co Lin Lo'; and it was thus that I moved into her basement. I think that she was terribly disappointed that I was not Chinese!

Enid was intelligent, scatter-brained and stylish; and she had lots of stories about the house. Bram Stoker had lived there and had written *Dracula* in the basement – she was sure it had been there! And, then, in her own kitchen: '*Somebody, you know, once committed suicide in this kitchen and sometimes as I look around it – don't you know – I'm not surprised!*' She also had a succession of Italian lovers. At this time it was Ricardo Priuli – son of Lilian – who provided the essential services.



ricardo, along with his mother and his sister, Francesca, had left Italy because of Mussolini. After the Abyssinian affair and the Racial Laws they had begun to receive premonitions of *the worst*; and, in this way, they were examples of an Italian refugee culture

– many of them, though not all, Jewish – which was a curious replica of an earlier, and highly educated, Italian community, the political refugees of 1820 to 1860–70.

As a lover Ricardo was not highly animated; in order to be stimulated he generally needed two Haydn quartets – and I was *obliged* to know this because I lived underneath and worked late. As a rather boisterous aesthete his tastes in painting, I should say, oscillated between Piet Mondrian/Ben Nicholson and Max Ernst/René Magritte. He didn't, seriously, know anything about Le Corbusier – though he really felt he ought to; but since mannerism had become a mildly fashionable taste – Nikolaus Pevsner's article, 'The Architecture of Mannerism', dates from 1946 – and since he found me crazed about mannerism and his mother equally crazed about The Council of Trent, putting the two of us together must have seemed to Ricardo to be a project fraught with, maybe, amusing possibilities.

At this stage, when I have taken so long to get *not* so very far, I feel I should now say why. It seems that my memory is principally spatial. Or that, to set recollection in motion, I need to reconstruct a house or, preferably, a room, to make a catalogue of its episodes or furniture – and the more detail the better – and then, by doing so, I can begin to recall *events* – things, people and conversations. And this must be my excuse for a protracted examination of a typical London house and a specific Chelsea drawing room.

I believe this to be a fairly normal *mnemonic* process. For Mario Praz I suppose that all that Empire furniture of his *was* the instigation of chains of memory; for Jim Stirling I know that comparable furniture acted as comparable stimulus; and I rather suspect that this must also have been the case with Edgar Allan Poe. And for myself? And *that* yellow chair? Not, altogether, a case of Proust's *les vrais paradis sont les paradis perdus* – but, again like Proust and, this time, his *madeleine* – I never see a chair approximately like that chair or a yellow approximately like that yellow without the almost inevitable flood of recollection.

[I recall talking about the fourth] son of Henri II and Catherine de Medici; in spite of her uncle being Pope Leo X, the house of France would never have tolerated a marriage with the Medici – bankers and parvenus – if Henri had not been a younger son with little hope of succession. Henri's younger son was elected king of Poland, but on the death of his elder brother he returned to France – as the future Henri III – by way of Venice; at Venice he enjoyed a state reception on the Lido; the ceremonial background – a colonnade and a triumphal arch – designed by Palladio, later served as a model for Decimus Burton's arrangements at Hyde Park Corner in London; Henri's homoerotic propensities caused him to surround himself with far too many boyfriends, his *mignons*, all of them prone to dress in the Spanish style, in black; on the whole, the population of Paris was less than pleased by all this – I suppose this is what I intimated, but it didn't interest her. After all, she knew it and she knew that I knew it; evidently, I had inhibited a line of conversation which she would have preferred and her look, which I distinctly

remember, seemed to imply: 'But, dear boy, you are being terribly obvious, in a Protestant way, and I didn't think you could be so banal – like a nineteenth-century liberal.'

It was apparent that she would have preferred to talk about the *mignons* and their more esoteric tendencies. After a lapse of some 50 years, since I am sometimes rather slow, I now begin to understand. She had been hoping that I would refer to Giordano Bruno, Neapolitan, ex-Dominican, born 1552, who had travelled around teaching the *art of memory*, a traditional speciality of the Dominican order of which St Thomas Aquinas had been a prime exponent. And to make *this* even better – though I just didn't know about it then – I should have been able to add a question: 'But was it not at the court of Henri III that Bruno had instructed the king and his *mignons* and proposed for them a sort of "theatre of memory"?' And, to have made things even better, to have conversation flow, I should have added: 'And might there not be some connection between this metaphorical theatre in Paris and the Teatro Olimpico, erected in Vicenza by Palladio at almost the same date?'

Undoubtedly, this is what I should have said; but, as it was, I had been brash and, by her standards, obtuse in a great breathtaking way. In fact, as I see it now, she had wanted to introduce me to an arcane intellectual tradition, Pythagorean, Cabalistic, incipiently Rosicrucian, and claiming a pedigree drawn from the 'Egyptian mysteries'. So I had failed her. Though she partly believed in this tradition, she had wanted to suggest to me – surprising from a woman of her generation – not only that Henri III and the *mignons* had been adepts in this tradition, but also that Andrea Palladio and his patron, editor of Vitruvius, Daniele Barbaro, had been among its representatives.



strange! Because, had I but known it, I could have acquired this story at the Warburg Institute almost any day – though scarcely from Rudolf Wittkower. The full story might have been rather too exotic for him, but there was Frances Yates, who shared virtually all the Priuli interests – Henri III, Giordano Bruno, Paolo Sarpi and Galileo – and was somewhat intrigued by my spending so much time with the contessa.

At that time at the Warburg Institute, all the Fellows (I was called a Junior Research Fellow) were very discreetly assimilated Jewish. We two were the only very visible *goyim* (a word that was never used, of course), the only gentiles – it's amusing that this should relate both to the *gentle* and the *genteel*. Fritz Saxl and Rudolf Wittkower were the most important people for me there. Saxl: mercurial, indefatigable, helpful and incredibly kind, truly Austro-Hungarian, Viennese in his attitudes, Aby Warburg's essential aide, who in 1933 had quickly brought the institute from Hamburg to London; sometimes, with a shoulder shrug, he would say to me that his only ambition in life was to be operating a small delicatessen in the vicinity of Prague. Wittkower was my own particular teacher, serious, scarcely vivacious, overtly laborious, infinitely concerned; he had come to the institute shortly after its arrival in London, after spending some ten years at the Hertziana in Rome. And, then, there were two women of whose presence I was extremely aware, both in their different ways mementos of the Hamburg days: Gertrud Bing and Annemarie Meier. Bing, long-time assistant to Warburg and now companion to Saxl, was I believe some sort of niece of the Hamburg collector who had established himself as an art nouveau dealer in

Paris in the 1890s; and Annemarie, indispensable secretary, who privately lamented the institute's presence in London and would have preferred – as maybe would the New York Warburgs – that it had relocated to Princeton. Saxl, she said, would have been perfectly happy with Panofsky in Princeton, the funding would have been better, and it was really only that old Vienna anglophilia – a characteristic also of Adolf Loos and Sigmund Freud – which had steered Saxl to London. As the best of all *probable* strategies, though *possible* problems might be imagined, I am sure that she was right.

So the only two *goyim* were Frances Yates and myself. I shared a little space in the library next to her rather bigger one; with hindsight, I see that my failure to comprehend her intrinsic interests – they were much the same as Priuli's – was an inexcusable failure of interpretation. But I found her a little stiff, a little slow and maybe – though I didn't really know it – a little too High Church Anglican. So there were no electric sparks which flashed between us. Lilian may have been a grandmother figure, but I preferred her more accomplished allure. It was a case of scholarship *versus* experience. Yates' intuitions had been acquired, but I felt that Priuli's were, in some way, inherent. With Priuli, one could almost feel that one was *touching* history, with Yates I always felt – some several degrees – removed. And *this* was an error, as I now confess.

Frances Yates, I am sure, would have been highly amused by my present exercise of the *art of memory*; and I would have liked to have been able to tell her that, in this exercise, I haven't used any of Bruno's recommendations.

But it was rather a strange life, this Warburg episode: sixteenth-century architectural ambiguities and walks, backwards and forwards, to South Kensington or Earl's Court, two or three afternoons a week with Rudolf Wittkower – and sixteenth-century religious conflict, one or two evenings with Lilian Priuli. And – in between whiles – various nocturnal thumpings transmitted from the floor above.

Contessa Priuli knew Frances Yates, I think not intimately but with her usual perception. The story of Galileo, Antonio Priuli, the campanile and the velvet-lined telescope is intrinsically Lilian; Frances Yates tells this story and, with her, I wonder about its provenance – it seems to be equipped with less personal vibrations. Contessa Priuli did not know Rudolf Wittkower and I begin to wonder what might have happened had I somehow arranged a meeting. Another case of scholarship *versus* experience? They both of them felt that they knew Venetian villas – Priuli with the know-how and the prejudice of the insider, but where she would be anecdotal, Wittkower would be analytical. *Architectural Principles* had not yet appeared as a book, though it had existed for some time as a sequence of articles in the *Warburg Journal*. Lilian was familiar enough with these to applaud the analysis of harmonic proportion and musical ratio, but her instincts differed from Wittkower's deductions in the appraisal of (to her) more familiar particulars, as, for instance, in the judgement of the character of Giangiorgio Trissino, Palladio's first preceptor and patron, 'the glory of our age'. For Wittkower, immersed in an art historical culture, Trissino was a humanist paragon; but from Priuli, immersed in Venetian politics and the history of religion, I received the impression that Trissino had not been an entirely admirable character – if possible, something distinctly worse than Kurt von Beckerath. If not 'cruel to his

horses', he was more than *cruel* to his son, whom he had denounced to the Inquisition as a Lutheran heretic, with painful results.

She was also – though I don't think that she was in any position to judge – doubtful about Wittkower's closing discussion, 'The Break-Away from the Laws of Harmonic Proportion'. She felt that everything could not be so circumscribed, that there must be eruptions from outside; and thus she was disturbed by the negative interpretation of English and Scottish aestheticians considered responsible for this 'break-away': William Hogarth, David Hume, Edmund Burke, Lord Kames, Richard Payne Knight, Archibald Alison. She found that this was an inadequate presentation, felt without compassion and understanding, an example of what she used to call 'rather textbook'.

Repeat: her taste for the arcane tradition of Giordano Bruno had caused her to be highly responsive to the concepts of musical ratio, mathematical law and harmonic proportion; but, as I now see it, she also knew the exigencies of a dissenting attitude, the insistencies of what today we would call the romantic revolution. And it was in this context of positive-negative, yes-no, figure-ground reaction that, I believe, being inspired by her, I wrote that ambiguous article which has received a too extensive/obsessive attention, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa'.

Wittkower didn't like the article; Priuli did. Rudy saw it as lacking in scholarship and frivolous; Lilian saw it from her more experiential point of view, and she saw it as deadly serious. She *delighted* in the sixteenth-century clash between religious ideologies – in apprehending it; but she *approved* the Venetian policy – in the interests of 'trade' and 'communication' – of working to minimise the violence of ideological collision. Might one coin the word *Veneto-philia*? As 'think intensely but live and let live', it sufficiently defines her attitude, and she knew it to have been the attitude/policy preferred and pursued, to some extent by Holland in the seventeenth century, and by England in the eighteenth century – but she didn't know the American Revolution and the United States. An attitude without *extreme* commitment, a policy without passion, a concern for self-interest leniently understood – deviations from this historical 'Venetian' mind-set were to her aberrations; and it was thus that she condemned the policy pursued, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in condemning her theologically modernist friends. Private fervour: public tolerance; and Lilian did have her little Picasso – I see her clutching it under the piano when the house fell on top of her – and, for her, in this scarcely minor catastrophe – this little picture must have been an item of faith.

I have had two principal teachers: Rudolf Wittkower and Henry-Russell Hitchcock. In Texas, as I have recorded, I had the good – and the bad – luck to have been instructed by Jean Murray Bangs (Mrs Harwell Hamilton Harris), who tried – without success – to convert me to the 'doctrine' of Frank Lloyd Wright; but who did succeed – with persuasion rather than belligerence – in instilling some preliminary conviction related to the United States.

However, my principal teacher must have been Lilian Priuli-Bon, whose lesson was less *singular* than those of the three others, and who, in delivering it, expended *no* effort. It is strange, perhaps, that the men eschewed any political culture while the women embraced it.

Postscript

In early 1992, after three decades at Cornell, Colin Rowe left Ithaca to undertake a brief teaching assignment in Rome before retiring in early July to a flat that his brother David had prepared for him in Gloucester Avenue, London. He stayed only two months. Rowe returned to Ithaca for a year, and then went back to London for another year, before moving once again – this time to Washington, DC – in the autumn of 1994. And there he remained for the last five years of his life – with his wondrous library, renowned Italian engravings and a stunning collection of furniture – renting an apartment in the Kennedy-Warren, an enormous block that he once described as a ‘sort of proto-unité’ and a building ‘not without provenance’, since Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson and ‘no less than Otto von Habsburg’ had all once lived there.

On his death in November 1999 Rowe’s entire library and most of his papers went to the Charles Moore Foundation in Austin, Texas. A few things remained in Washington, though, in complete disarray, including some of Rowe’s writings. At the request of his brother these were kept by one of Rowe’s close friends, a former student at Cornell.

In the summer of 2012 I was collecting a number of Rowe’s letters for publication. David referred me to this Washington collection, and there I found nine letters. I also discovered three, undated, typewritten essays on someone called Contessa Priuli-Bon. I didn’t know who she was, but I remembered a ‘Lilian Priuli-Bon’ from a letter Rowe had written to his friend Alex Caragone (editor of his three-volume anthology, *As I Was Saying*). On 24 March 1996 Rowe wrote to Caragone, telling him of his plan to publish a final collection of ten essays, to be called *Footprints and Footnotes*, he said, and dedicated to ‘Phyllis Lambert and to the memory of Lilian Priuli’. The book would include an ‘Excursus on Contessa Priuli’ among its contents. The essay published here, the longest of the three metal-cabinet essays, is that excursus.

Rowe first met Priuli-Bon in 1946 while he was a student at the Warburg Institute and renting a basement flat in Paultons Square, Chelsea. She lived nearby, had published a book on the Italian high Renaissance painter

Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (better known by the pseudonym Sodoma), and had spent much of her life in Italy married to a Venetian architect, a descendent of the important sixteenth-century Priuli family. At that time Rowe was preparing his MA thesis on Inigo Jones under the supervision of Rudolf Wittkower. He was also writing his first essay for *The Architectural Review*, ‘The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa’. Concerned with ratios, architectural principles and sixteenth-century Palladian villas – and thought by many to this day to be his defining work – the essay set out ideas important to both Wittkower and Priuli-Bon. ‘Wittkower didn’t like the article: Priuli did’, Rowe tells us. ‘Rudy saw it as lacking in scholarship and frivolous: Lilian saw it from her more experiential point of view, and she saw



it as deadly serious.’ Wittkower, he continues, was ‘analytical’, ‘serious, scarcely vivacious, overtly laborious, infinitely concerned’. He was ‘immersed in an art historical culture’. Priuli-Bon, on the other hand, was ‘anecdotal’, ‘immersed in Venetian politics and the history of religion’, and had a ‘remarkable historical intelligence’. She also offered her history effortlessly and without insistence; and clearly Rowe favours her position over Wittkower’s, in many ways using her to represent sixteenth-

century Venice, the city that served as metaphor in 50 years of his writing.

It seems that Rowe wrote the excursus in 1997 or 1998. A few years earlier he had published other essays about other influences in his life – in 1994 ‘Henry-Russell Hitchcock’, ‘Texas and Mrs Harris’, ‘Cambridge 1958–1962’ and ‘Two Italian Encounters’ (about a chance meeting in Arezzo with San Francisco architect Arthur Brown); and in 1984 ‘James Stirling: A Highly Personal and Very Disjointed Memoir’. But he had published nothing about Priuli-Bon and, as importantly, nothing of substance about Wittkower, the historian assumed by many to be the major influence on his writing.

The excursus seems to correct this view, for in telling us about Priuli-Bon, Rowe is also telling us about Wittkower. She becomes a kind of *aide-mémoire* through which he remembers life in London in the mid-1940s, his teachers, schools, friends, influences and life in a

basement flat in a Chelsea terrace. He recalls sounds, colours, furnishings and conversations, and mentions his Warburg colleague, Frances Yates, noting that his own memory is ‘principally spatial’ and that ‘to set recollection in motion’ he needs to ‘reconstruct a house or, preferably, a room, to make a catalogue of its episodes or furniture’.

Recollection, recall, reconstruction, remembrance. Like *Collage City*, like the best of postmodern architecture, ‘Excursus on Contessa Priuli’ presents us with the past as a palpable entity. And its prose style encourages this association. It’s a story and it rambles, getting even more rambling as his appreciation for Priuli-Bon grows. Its sentences are seldom simple declaratives. They eschew conventional structure and punctuation, assuming phrasing (as ever with Rowe) that suggests the spoken, not the written, word. The essay in this sense is both a written ‘talk’ and an exquisitely construed memoir. ‘You see I believe in the reading of memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, biographies and the like’, Rowe wrote to his former student Mark Hinchman in a letter in January 1996. ‘That is because, like Disraeli, I conceive these to be the stuff out of which history is made. Then, also, it’s because I do like a bit o’ gossip’.—Daniel Naegele

Il Sodoma (Giovanni Antonio Bazzi),
self-portrait with badgers,
Abbey of Monte Olivetto, 1502

Contributors

Paolo Berdini was an art and architectural historian who taught at Stanford and Columbia University. He received his PhD from Columbia with a thesis on Jacopo Bassano, which served as the basis for his subsequent book, *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (1997) and was the author of a wide variety of essays and books on subjects as diverse as Walter Gropius, Caravaggio, the architectural patronage of Cardinal Richelieu and Michelangelo. He was the first to translate Colin Rowe's *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* into Italian (1990) and to write extensively in that language on the contribution of the English critic. Berdini received his architectural training both at the University of Rome and Cornell, where he graduated with Rowe as his thesis advisor in 1985, with a proposal for a new project envisioning a branch of the Warburg Institute in Italy.

Alexander Brodsky is a Russian artist and architect. In the 1980s, together with Ilya Utkin, he produced a series of celebrated architectural etchings which were exhibited worldwide, and now form part of the permanent collections of the V&A and Tate Modern. He moved to the US in 1996 to work as an artist, and returned to Moscow in 2000 where he has continued to balance architectural commissions for restaurants, apartments, galleries, museums and most recently an Austrian bus shelter, with artworks and sculptures. He is currently preparing an installation for the Russian pavilion at the 2016 Venice architecture biennale.

Hubert Damisch is emeritus professor of the history and theory of art at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. He has also held academic posts at Cornell University, Columbia University and the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, Washington, DC, and is the author of numerous books, including *Théorie du nuage: pour une histoire de la peinture* (1972), *L'origine de la perspective* (1987), *Le jugement de Pâris* (1992) and *Skyline: La ville narcissi* (1996).

Thomas Daniell is head of the department of architecture and design at the University of St Joseph, Macau and a visiting associate professor at the University of Tokyo. Widely published, his books include *FOBA: Buildings* (2005), *After the Crash: Architecture in Post-Bubble Japan* (2008), *Houses and Gardens of Kyoto* (2010) and *Kiyoshi Sey Takeyama + Amorphe* (2011). His book *An Anatomy of Influence* is forthcoming from AA Publications.

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Max Moya is a Peruvian architect and a graduate of the AA's MA in Histories & Critical Thinking. In 2015 he travelled to Sri Lanka on the last leg of a global, and grand, architectural tour, where he visited a number of works by local architect Geoffrey Bawa.

Daniel Naegele is an architect and associate professor at Iowa State University. A graduate of the AA and Yale, he wrote his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Mary McLeod and Joseph Rykwert at the University of Pennsylvania. His writings on Le Corbusier and architectural photography have appeared worldwide, and his *Letters of Colin Rowe* is forthcoming from Artifice in 2016.

Colin Rowe was born near Bolton-on-Dearne in South Yorkshire in 1920 and studied architecture at the University of Liverpool, architectural history at the Warburg Institute and at Yale with Henry-Russell Hitchcock on a year-long Fulbright scholarship. He taught at the University of Liverpool (1950–52), the University of Texas-Austin (1954–56), the University of Cambridge (1958–62) and Cornell University (1962–92), before retiring briefly to London (1993–94) and ultimately to Washington, DC. His books include *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa & Other Essays* (1976), *Collage City*, with Fred Koetter (1978), *The Architecture of Good Intentions* (1994), the three-volume *As I Was Saying* (1996) and, with Leon Satkowski, *Italian Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, published posthumously in 2002. Rowe died in Washington, DC in November 1999. His ashes are scattered at the Temple of the Four Winds, Castle Howard, Yorkshire.

Peter St John is a partner of Caruso St John Architects, whose completed projects include the New Art Gallery Walsall, Chiswick House Gardens Café, the Millbank project at Tate Britain and Newport Street Gallery. He is also currently a guest professor at London Metropolitan University, and has previously taught at ETH Zurich, Bath University, Harvard GSD and the AA.

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Daniel Sherer is an architectural historian, critic and theorist who teaches at Columbia University and Yale School of Architecture. He is the author of numerous essays on Italian Renaissance, modern and contemporary architecture and art, and is the translator of Manfredo Tafuri's *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects* (2006). He is currently working on a collection of essays on the historical roots of modern architecture – *The Historical Sense of Modern Architecture* – which will be published in the MIT Writing Architecture series in 2017.

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Mario Tedeschini-Lalli is a journalist and scholar whose long journalism career includes 40 years as a reporter and editor, mostly on foreign affairs; he later served as editor for various digital and multimedia news outlets, primarily with the Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, of which he is now deputy director for innovation and development. His scholarly publications include essays on the history of the Middle East, Italy and the media. His further research on Steinberg's architectural and interior design work will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Territorio*, the journal of the school of architecture at the Politecnico di Milano.